DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 361 911 EA 025 315

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TITLE	Gender and Politics at Work: Why Women Exit the Superintendency.
INSTITUTION	National Policy Board for Educational Administration, Fairfax, VA.
SPONS AGENCY	Danforth Foundation, St. Louis, Mo.
PUB DATE	Aug 93
NOTE	42p.
AVAILABLE FROM	National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 4400 University Drive, Fairfax, VA 22030.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Educational Administration; Elementary Secondary Education; Employment Patterns; Equal Opportunities (Jobs); *Females; *Labor Turnover; *Sex Bias; Sex Stereotypes; *Superintendents; *Women Administrators

ABSTRACT

Findings of a study that explored reasons why women exit the superintendency are presented in this document. Data were collected through open-ended telephone interviews conducted with 20 women who left superintendencies within the past 7 years and with 4 women informants, all derived through snowball sampling. One-third had voluntarily exited their positions and two-thirds had left involuntarily. Those who had left of their own volition did so because of "pulls" toward other options or interests. Involuntary leave-takers left because of "pushes," and most frequently cited political factors as the cause of exit. None saw gender as the primary cause of exit; however, multiple gender-related factors shaped both the context of the women's daily work and their perspectives on the departure. Suggestions to help retain women in the superintendency are offered, based on Ragins and Sandstrom's (1989) four-tiered model that analyzes interaction at the individual, interpersonal, organizational, and societal levels. On the individual level it is suggested that work and role-related knowledge and skills can and shall be further developed by individual initiative. On the interpersonal level, most involuntary exiters advocated increased formal training to "better prepare" school board members for interaction with female administrators. Increased attention to political skills-building and more and more effective formal and informal support systems for women superintendents are also advocated. On the organizational level, several additional approaches are suggested, including the implementation of more equitable selection and tracking practices and the creation of national certification and retirement systems for superintendents. And finally, on the societal level, the overriding need is to change traditional conceptions of leadership and gender roles so that women's contributions will be more fully valued. Recommendations are also offered to local school boards, universities, state policymakers, professional associations, and the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA). (LMI)

ED 361 911

GENDER AND POLITICS AT WORK:

WHY WOMEN EXIT THE SUPERINTENDENCY

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This project was developed and published
with funds from the Danforth Foundation

August, 1993

The opinions, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this monograph do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the National Policy Board for Educational Administration or of its sponsoring organizations.

The National Policy Board is sponsored by the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, American Association of School Administrators, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Association of School Business Officials, Chief State School Officers, National Association of Elementary School Principals, National Association of Secondary School Principals, National Council of Professors of Educational Administration, National School Boards Association, and the University Council for Educational Administration.

Copies of Gender and Politics at Work: Why Women Exit the Superintendency may be ordered from: The National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 4400 University Drive, Fairfax, VA 22030-4444, phone (703) 993-3644, fax (703) 993-3643. Single copy price is $8.00.

Printed in the United States of America.

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PREFACE

One of the purposes specified in the Charter of the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) is "to increase the recruitment and placement of women and minorities in positions of educational leadership." The report which follows illustrates one of several Board initiatives to address that goal.

While this research was commissioned by the NPBEA, the interpretations of findings and recommendations for action are those of the authors. This report should prompt additional inquiry into the role of women in educational leadership, and create action aimed at retaining women and members of other underrepresented groups in the superintendency.

The authors gratefully acknowledge the contributions of the 24 women who participated in this study, as well as the support and assistance of Scott D. Thomson and Patrick B. Forsyth. Comments and inquiries may be directed to the authors, in care of Syracuse University, 150 Huntington Hall, Syracuse, NY 13244. Copies of the report may be obtained directly from the NPBEA.

GENDER AND POLITICS AT WORK: WHY WOMEN EXIT THE SUPERINTENDENCY

The superintendency is a key position of power and influence in America's approximately 15,000 school districts. Women are woefully underrepresented in this leadership role. To date, much of the scholarship relevant to female school leaders has focused on improved means of preparing, recruiting, sponsoring, and selecting women for advanced administrative work in education. By comparison, little attention has been given to issues of retention - - that is, to understanding the multiple factors related to whether or not women remain in these key positions.

One reason to move beyond deserved concern for entry-level issues is that, with such longstanding, dominant participation of white males in educational leadership, the loss of even a few women and members of underrepresented groups can be significant. Retention deals with women already trained, contributing to the profession, and proven capable of negotiating the career pathways more frequently travelled and shaped by men.

We know that turnover rates in school superintendencies are high, and tenure is short, compared to that of other educational roles. Not surprisingly, studies of turnover and tenure patterns in the superintendency have been dominated by male samples, with infrequent disaggregation of data by gender.

PURPOSE

Our study was designed, therefore, to address both: (a) the absence of women's perspectives in general, and (b) inattention to issues related specifically to retaining women in school superintendencies. It was assumed that insights important to both of these areas could be gained by investigating the experiences of women who have recently exited the superintendency.

The term "exit" is not herein confused or combined with retirement or movement from one school district superintendency to another. The subjects of our study are women who, either voluntarily or under pressure, were non-renewed or resigned from the superintendency. They subsequently moved into other roles, internal or external to K-12 public education. In this way, our definition of exit is more focused than that of other recent research on superintendents' departures (Curcio, 1992; Hord, 1992).

Scholarship related to exiting the superintendency confirms that the role has long been characterized by vulnerability, isolation, and conflict (Blumberg, 1985; Cuban, 1976, 1985; Curcio, 1992). The American Association of School Administrators' [AASA] longitudinal analyses of self-report data indicate increasing degrees of stress in the superintendency over the past 30 years, with women reporting slightly higher stress levels than men (Glass, 1991). The AASA random sample of superintendents nationwide also reported that the factors most likely to dominate decisions to leave were district financial problems, community pressures, and conflicts with the school board (Glass, 1991, p. 9). There is an extensive literature documenting the longstanding tension endemic to superintendent-school board relationships (Boyd, 1975; Danzberger et al., 1992; Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970; Institute for Educational Leadership, 1986; Tallerico, 1989; Tucker & Ziegler, 1980; Ziegler & Jennings, 1974; Zeigler et al., 1985). And historical analyses demonstrate the social and political turbulence characteristic of local educational governance, the context of superintendents' work.

Consistent with naturalistic inquiry and grounded theory traditions, our research was driven by a concern for understanding human experience from the actors' own frames of reference (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Lincoln, 1985). Thus, the present study was initiated with no prespecified hypotheses in mind.

Sensitive to Klein's (1983) distinction between research on women and research for women, we undertook this study of former women superintendents with the ultimate objective of answering three questions: Why are some women leaving the superintendency? What do their experiences tell us about how to help retain women in key leadership roles in education? How can current and prospective superintendents learn from what these informants shared with us? Our intent has been to contribute to the research that takes "women's needs, interests, and experiences into account and aims at being instrumental in improving women's lives" (Klein, 1983, p. 90). This study has confirmed that in women's lives gender and politics are entwined, (as they are in a different, usually unobserved, way in men's lives). Women who undertake positions of educational leadership may find unexpected pitfalls in the gender expectations of men and women with whom they work, whether those be professional colleagues or community members.

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

The principal means of data collection for this qualitative study were open-ended telephone interviews of women who exited superintendencies within the past seven years. The interview strategy was selected because the sensitive nature of the study required extensive conversation and probing of individual circumstances, contexts, and perspectives.

All interviews were conducted by the first author, and each was audiotaped and transcribed. Multiple copies of transcripts were used to index and sort respondents' statements by content. All data were coded independently by two authors. Constant-comparative procedures involving inductive analyses simultaneous to data collection were employed. Emergent categories and themes were examined and revised through a series of discussion and reflective memoranda-writing by all three researchers.

Sampling

A total of 24 persons were interviewed. Twenty were women who had exited superintendencies, and four were women informants whose perspectives helped shape the collection and analyses of data. Two of the women informants were superintendent search consultants, one a retired superintendent, and one a current district superintendent.

The process of identifying and locating exited superintendents was complex. Although state and national associations of administrators, as well as state education departments, often collect and disseminate information about current and retired superintendents, they do not continue to track individuals once they leave their positions. Individual school districts, while willing to name their previous superintendents, were often reluctant (and in some cases unable) to provide specific information key to locating potential study participants.

Because of this, "snowball" and reputational sampling were employed. Initial contacts were made at the national level, through organizations such as The Council of Great City Schools and The American Association of School Administrators. These led to followup contacts with various state associations of women administrators, state organizations of superintendents, university professors, and search consultants. Additionally, as interviews were completed,

each participant was asked if she could help identify other women who had exited superintendencies. Thus, the leads "snowballed" to 31 persons, 20 of whom were willing to volunteer for the study. Those unwilling to be interviewed cited a variety of reasons, ranging from lack of time, overabundance of requests for participation in research projects and, in one case, reluctance to resurrect unpleasant memories associated with the exit. All volunteers cited their interest in helping others learn from their exit experiences and perspectives on the superintendency.

FINDINGS

A background analysis on the 20 former-superintendent interviewees revealed that fifty percent (10) exited rural districts, 30% (6) suburban, and 20% (4) urban. Three of the four urban superintendents are African-American, two of the six suburban superintendents are Asian-American, and all others (15) are white. The districts they left are in nine different states: seven in New York; two each in Connecticut, New Jersey, Ohio, Indiana, and California; and one in Iowa, Wisconsin, and Alabama. One woman had held three consecutive superintendencies and five had served in two different districts. For 70% of the women (14 of 20), their first superintendency was their last. The average length of tenure in last superintendencies was 3.35 years, with a range of one to five years. The overall average length of tenure, including all multiple superintendencies, was 3.66 years, with a range of one to seven years. How do these tenure durations compare to non-exiters? National averages are between five and six years for all types of superintendencies, and 2.5 years for urban settings (Glass, 1991).

Classification of Exits and Subsequent Positions

Approximately one-third of all exits (7 of 20) were voluntary and two-thirds (13 of 20) involuntary. Exits were considered voluntary if it was the superintendent's choice to leave and if it was clear that the school board would have (or already had) renewed her contract.

With respect to the 13 involuntary exits, most (9 of 13) left "under pressure" and 4 were fired. None of the dismissals went uncontested. That is, in each of the four cases, the superintendent took legal action against the school

board for unfair termination. In each of the four lawsuits, the superintendent won her case. For the 9 who exited under pressure, it had become clear to these women that it was "time to leave," therefore they chose either to "resign under fire" mid-term or to refrain from contesting the board's non-renewal of contract.

What sorts of roles did interviewees assume immediately subsequent to their exits from the superintendency? Six took positions in K-12 central office administration. Four became university professors, and three were s elf-employed. Two each became elementary school principals or directors of non-profit organizations. Two remained unemployed at the time of the interview (two months and one year, respectively, after their exits). And one became a full-time graduate student to complete her doctorate.

Reasons for Exiting

Why have some women left the superintendency? The decision to exit was never simple. Rare was the instance in which there was anything that might be construed as a single "trigger event" or "critical incident." Instead, for both voluntary and involuntary departures, contributing factors were multiple, overlapping, and often cumulative over time. Moreover, at work were both "pushes from" the superintendency and "pulls toward" other options, interests, or concerns. We discuss the latter first, as they are fewer in number.

Pulls

The attractions pulling respondents away from their superintendencies were of three forms. In declining order of frequency, they were: new job opportunities, child-rearing concerns, and personal mission. These pulls were primary factors in all seven voluntary exiters' decisions to leave. They served as compounding factors (in combination with several "pushes" to be described later) in three involuntary exits.

It is impossible to discuss the specifics of the case of "personal mission" without compromising anonymity. Since this factor was salient to only one respondent, her choice could be considered an "outlier" among voluntary exits. Suffice it to say, however, that a unique entrepreneurial venture attracted her away from the superintendency.

Though family and/or child-rearing were important to all respondents, these concerns became the principal motivator for exit in just one case. This individual had two pre-school age children and her superintendency was some 60 miles from her home. It should be noted that all but four interviewees are mothers, and virtually all described the complexity of balancing personal and professional lives as superintendents.

The most frequent attraction was the availability of an appealing new job. This was salient in eight separate instances, including all seven voluntary exits and one of the thirteen involuntary. What kinds of positions served as attractors? For three persons, assistant superintendencies or directorships at the central office level; for another three, university professorships; and for two individuals, principalships. Why were these roles considered attractive?

The central office positions had three features in their favor:

1. They were located in higher status districts. Whereas these women's superintendencies had been in rural and poor school communities, the assistant superintendencies and directorships which became available were in suburban, higher wealth districts.

2. Curriculum and instruction were central in the new job. In contrast (and as will be explained more thoroughly in subsequent sections of this monograph), the superintendency often was dominated by either political or non-instructional issues.

3. The salary was better. Although monetary factors were never primary motivators, it was appealing to be able to earn as much or more in a central office role in a district with greater educational resources than to keep a superintendency in an impoverished, remote community.

University professorships were attractive to some respondents. Clearly financial gain was not a motivator in these instances, as all involved decreases in the superintendent's previous salary. However, the move to postsecondary education was viewed as a quality-of-life decision. It was assumed that there would be considerably less stress and scrutiny in the professoriate than in the superintendency. Equally important, respondents felt they could make important and much-needed contributions to the preparation of prospective educational

administrators. It was widely agreed, among both voluntary and involuntary exiters, that most university-based programs inadequately address current realities in the field of practice.

And lastly, two respondents were attracted by the principalship. After first-hand experience in the role of superintendent, both decided that their interests were more compatible with the role of principal. Both opportunities emerged in districts where these women had "risen through the ranks." Thus, in some ways, it was like "going home" to contexts where their achievements had long been supported and welcomed. Their previous reputations as building administrators followed them and they were actively recruited to return to their former districts.

Pushes: Political Factors

In contrast to the above attractions primarily influencing voluntary departures, what factors or conditions contributed to involuntary exits from the superintendency? The most frequently recurring theme is captured in a word - - politics. As illustrated by one respondent: "I began to realize that the superintendency is not a position in education but a position of politics." We gathered evidence of multiple meanings for the term "politics," and varied forms of disenchantment resulting from cumulative insights about the pervasiveness of politics in the superintendency. Essentially four patterns characterized respondents' definitions of the political nature of the superintendency: (a) school board "dysfunction;" (b) union influences, (c) non-educational foci, and (d) moral or ethical clashes.

School board "dysfunction" was variously defined. For many it meant the superintendent-school board relationship had deteriorated. This, of course, was related to a number of context-specific reasons too varied to detail herein. However, decline in the quality of the working relationship was often directly related to the superintendent's perception that one or more board members had become increasingly (and inappropriately) involved in administration and operational functions. School board members had crossed an invisible boundary between policymaking and professional prerogative - - excessive "meddling," in the most candid descriptions.

In other cases, dysfunction had little or nothing to do with the superintendent-school board relationship but instead centered on intra-board conflicts. Disagreement and turmoil among board members, incessant in-fighting, and unresponsiveness to conflict resolution efforts predominated in these cases. Illustrative of superintendents' frustration with the latter is one respondent's observation that "I think it's a shame that there is an expectation that the care and nurturing of boards of education will take precedence over the care and nurturing of teachers and students."

Whether the dysfunction was viewed as intra-board or between board and superintendent, it was sometimes fueled by "single-issue" board members and, other times, by either turnover or power shifts on the board. There was general agreement that the number of board members with singular or narrow agenda is increasing, and that this interferes with group cohesiveness, interpersonal relationships, and a global perspective on district priorities. Additionally, with respect to shifts in power on the board and member turnover, it was not uncommon for respondents to find themselves in a situation where the board's expectations had changed significantly from the time they were hired.

Union influence, (both teachers' and administrators'), often intersected with board power shifts, changed expectations, and/or member turnover. These internal stakeholder groups were able to exacerbate the kinds of dysfunction described above by mobilizing the wider community or engaging media attention. For example, in some districts, teacher groups effectively resisted superintendent or board-initiated change by using overt and covert resources to orchestrate school board member turnover at election time. A more subtle but similarly effective strategy centered on informal lobbying and pressure on individual board members to advocate a certain stance. The effectiveness of the latter was increased in those contexts already characterized by intra-board disagreement or single-issue members. That is, existing lack of cohesion on the board made individual board members more vulnerable to stakeholder group pressures. Moreover, in the face of cutbacks in expenditures and reductions-in-force, such influences and pressures could easily combine to deflect blame or causation to one individual - - the "superintendent as scapegoat" phenomenon.

Non-educational foci formed a third major theme in respondents' definitions of the politics of the superintendency. Since most of these women were

superintendents in either quite poor rural districts or, if African-American, urban districts with significant problems, it was frequently reported that the majority of the superintendent's time was consumed by financial, budget, and facilities concerns. Coupled with the political issues just described, the results were often that these women felt derailed from their core educational interests and expertise.

Two-thirds of our interviewees had greater experience in staff leadership roles (e.g., coordinating programs, developing staff and curriculum, supervising and evaluating instructional projects) than in line positions (e.g., the principalship). Only one of 20 respondents did not consider herself an expert in curriculum and instruction. Thus, the nature and non-instructional demands of the role were sources of disenchantment with the superintendency - - a kind of derailment or distancing from values defining the professional self.

Moral or ethical clashes were also important, though mentioned less frequently than other factors contributing to decisions to exit. Six of 20 cases involved at least one episode in which the superintendent took a self-described "ethical stand," stuck to a moral grounding of the issue, and subsequently lost the support of a majority of the board. Examples included superintendents' blowing the whistle on illegal or inappropriate fiscal activities of school board members or other personnel, recommending dismissal of individual teachers or administrators, or insisting on affirmative action in hiring decisions. Our respondents considered these phenomena distinct from other more routine disagreements or philosophical differences. Instead, they reflected "bottom-lines" with respect to the superintendent's personal integrity and sense of "being true to herself."

Financial and personnel matters were most often the substance of these clashes. Not surprisingly when people and money are involved, such issues served as lightning rods, often prompting the mobilization of other stakeholder groups (for example, professional unions or community constituents). Although exit-producing clashes were ultimately between superintendents and boards, these cases illustrate how each of our categories of analysis are actually quite interrelated.

In sum, school board dysfunction of various forms, pressures from unions, a preponderance of non-educational issues, and clashes in values and ethics were often interconnected strands in the political web in which these superintendents worked. Added to this complexity were social and structural conditions of work-life for women occupying male-dominated roles. We turn our attention now to gender-related contextual factors.

Pushes: Sex-typed Expectations

None of our respondents saw her gender as the primary cause of her exit. Most interviewees suspected that men leave the superintendency for reasons similar to theirs. (That question remains for future study.) Two respondents refuted any significance of gender-related variables. To wit: "Many people are leaving and I don't think being female has anything to do with it, to tell you the truth."

Nonetheless, gender-relevant examples were embedded in all but three descriptions of experiences and perspectives on exiting. These ranged from being subtly dissuaded from pursuing the superintendency by professors in university preparation programs, to being blatantly accused of not acting "tough enough" by board members, administrators, or teachers. The following examples are taken from interviewees' own sense-making of their experiences:

- "People still look at it as being a man's job. You have entry level that is female, then you have the higher administrative level that is male."
- "Some school board members don't believe women should run things."
- "I was not what they had expected. I did not fit the mold that they had had before."
- "Some want you to go out and 'kick butts,' so to speak. And that's just not the approach that I use."
- "That's not my style of leadership. I get people to do what they need to do, but I use different tactics."
- "If in any way [women administrators] deviate from that very narrow range of acceptable behavior, the reaction from other people in general is negative."

• "A woman in a power position in [this community] has always had a hard time getting people to trust them and accept them."

Taken together, these quotations reflect stereotypical images of what a "socially-acceptable" leader looks like and does. They reveal potent assumptions about the kinds of roles and responsibilities thought to be appropriate for men and women in American society. Such narrow, sex-typed mental models work against women superintendents. They make it appear that women do not "fit the bill" and leave unquestioned underlying assumptions about leadership. Some of these examples also allude to the dissonance that can emerge when people are confronted with individuals or behaviors that defy tradition or previous personal experience. At best, this dissonance can contribute to feelings of discomfort in interpersonal relationships. At worst, it creates obstacles to trust, acceptance, and confidence. None of these outcomes is conducive to positive working relationships in the superintendency. Instead, they constitute gender-related factors which work against women superintendents.

Additional examples of sex-typed expectations influencing the context of these women leaders' work included:

Perceptions of malleability. One respondent asserted that she likely was "hired because the board felt they could manipulate a woman more easily than they could a man." Each of the women who pursued legal action concurred that her board (and board attorney) underestimated, and were surprised by, her persistence and determination in seeing the lawsuit to its end.

Remuneration. Several interviewees indicated that their boards assumed they would work for a lower salary than would male superintendents.

Interpersonal treatment. Several provided evidence of being "bullied" by individual school board members or other district personnel (for example, unexpected personal appearances at the superintendent's home, with the intent of intimidation.) Several felt certain that the substance and tone of language used by board members when interacting with women would never have been employed in conversations with male superintendents.

Scrutiny. In the words of one respondent, "Women are looked at much more closely than men are. What we wear, to the earrings, to the fingernails. Everything."

Performance standards. Some women viewed their performance as continually measured by others against impossible or ambiguous standards. Whether they assumed the traditional male model of leadership ("take chargedness" and assertion) or the stereotypically female (nurturing and collaborative), women superintendents could be penalized on either account.

Knowledge domains. Many examples related to gender biases in others' assumptions about what men and women know. It was often assumed (and confirmed in board members' questions, for example), that women superintendents had a lot to learn about sports, facilities, and transportation services. "Would a male superintendent be criticized for not knowing how to organize a reading curriculum?"

Informal supports. The lateral support systems that develop among men superintendents in social settings or on the golf course, for example, were generally viewed as less available to females. As one respondent summed it up, "A lot of it you don't have, as a woman, as much as some of the men have."

Location of opportunities. Consistent with national demographics on the superintendency, the vast majority of our sample worked in either small rural districts (if they were white), or problematic urban districts (if African American). These are not "easy" places to be a superintendent. Only three of our 20 respondents had experiences in what would be considered "plum" suburban, high-wealth communities. The latter are far more frequently superintended by men.

In sum, multiple gender-related factors shaped both the context of these women's daily work and their perspectives on the exiting experience. Although the importance of such factors varied widely from case to case, each represents a potential source of miscommunication or misunderstanding in a set of relationships where trust and confidence in the leader are key. Taken together, they can work against women by exacerbating already difficult school board or political group dynamics. Essentially, sex-typed expectations work overtly and covertly to make a "normally" vulnerable leadership role become more so, for its women occupants.

APPROACHES TO RETENTION

Ragins and Sundstrom's (1989) synthesis of the literature on power and gender in organizations provides a useful model for understanding women superintendents' exits. This framework is based on four interrelated and overlapping levels of analysis: individual, interpersonal, organizational, and societal. In their view, "the larger aggregations (social systems and organizational) have a stronger impact on the smaller ones (interpersonal and individual) rather than vice versa" (Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989, p. 74).

For example, sex-role socialization, (a social systems process), can influence interpersonal dynamics through distorted perceptions and attributions related to work-role stereotypes. This same process impacts the individual level of analysis, when sex-role expectations at home contribute to conflict and role overload, for example, in women's efforts to balance their professional and personal lives. At the organizational level, informal tracking processes can confine women to certain district contexts, thereby restricting their access to more desirable work settings.

Thus, Ragins and Sundstrom's (1989) four-tiered model provides a conceptual framework which recognizes the interaction among levels of analysis: individual, interpersonal, organizational, and societal. A key virtue of using a multi-level perspective to frame any problem is that it draws attention to the need for multiple explanations or solutions. We will use Ragins and Sundstrom's (1989) four levels of analysis as a framework for discussing what might be done to help retain women in the superintendency.

But first, an important reminder. For a full third of our sample (7 of 20), the decision to exit was completely voluntary. Thus there is cause to celebrate both the insights into self and role which were attained, and the range of attractive new opportunities available to these women. In contrast, the recommendations which follow are meant to respond to issues raised by the two-thirds of our interviewees whose exits were involuntary.

The Individual Level

Approaches focused on the individual are often criticized for over-emphasizing "remediation" of perceived or attributed "deficiencies," sometimes

based on tendencies to "blame the victim." While acknowledging the limitations of exclusive reliance on any one strategy, the multi-faceted approaches we advocate do recognize a place for both framing the problem and addressing its solution at the level of the individual.

Work- and role-related knowledge and skills, for example, can and should be further developed by individual initiative. Either on-the-job or on-the-way-up, women superintendents can proactively expand and supplement their experiences by mentor-making, as contrasted with the more usual mentor-taking in career and knowledge development. In this way, for example, limited prior experience with "roofs, nails, and school finance" can be offset by aggressive pursuit of persons and opportunities for skill-building in these areas.

Reflection and self-assessment are also important to surviving and thriving in the superintendency. Several cases mentioned earlier illustrate the value of prior examination and understanding of individual ethical or moral "bottom lines." It seems critical for superintendents to develop self-knowledge of the points beyond which personal integrity supersedes the risk of unemployment. "Knowing thyself" and priority-setting may seem cliches, yet our evidence suggests a complete understanding is needed of how willing one is, for example, to "play political hardball."

Given the isolation characteristic of the role, examination of personal support systems is key. Many reported that spouses, other family members, friends, clergy, or mentors outside the district were crucial. Strong personal supports need to be in place, to compensate, at the individual level, for what is clearly absent at the organizational and systemic levels for women superintendents.

Awareness of legal and therapeutic options is also important at the individual level. According to our respondents, such information is not widely shared - - or, at least, not sought or gathered - - until immersed in crises. Choices to pursue either litigation or personal counseling were among the most difficult for women superintendents to make. Yet awareness of the options of legal redress (when treated unfairly by others) or professional therapy (when pain or turmoil in the role become oppressive) can empower individuals. As one respondent noted, administrators' professional organizations are often able to

provide lists of attorneys, but never of personal counselors or therapists. This observation is interesting in light of Gilligan's (1977) theoretical perspectives on moral development: predominance of an ethic of justice among men, an ethic of care and connection among women.

The Interpersonal Level

Two general categories of findings point to the importance of considering approaches to retention aimed at the interpersonal level: the salience of superintendent-school board relationships and the "outsider" and minority status of women in a male-dominated work role.

Preparation of school board members.

Most involuntary exiters advocated increased formal training to "better prepare" school board members for their roles and responsibilities. This was viewed as a partial solution to the problems of the intrusiveness of board members into administering the organization, the narrowness of their personal agenda, and their unresponsiveness to conflict resolution. Mandated training was seen as a way to deal with the deterioration of relationships resulting from board member turnover as well. The most frequently mentioned area for formal training was "understanding the policymaking role." However, some respondents suggested training related to the gender-stereotyping and gendered expectations that affect interpersonal relationships between women superintendents and their boards. They emphasized a need to educate board members about different styles of leadership, to enlighten them about "what women have to offer," and to broaden the vision of what a leader looks like and does.

In contrast to the preceding formal training, an informal model aimed at improving the board-superintendent relationship is based on a much less traditional educative approach. As shared by a key informant, she experienced considerable success by structuring private time to work with the board as a whole, through skillful use of executive sessions at board meetings. She developed this approach in order to continually focus on broad policy issues and educational goals. This pre-empted both derailment from core issues of teaching and learning, and fragmentation of the board into narrow or specialized individual pursuits. Was this an appropriate use of executive sessions? Yes, because it

was, in reality, focused on an important personnel issue: the continued employment and review of the superintendent. District and educational goals were linked to the superintendent's performance and she welcomed the frequent opportunities to explain what she was doing to reach board-approved goals and implement board policy. Proactive approaches such as this are underutilized as a means of improving superintendent-board communication, yet they could be replicated in other settings.

The consultants who conduct superintendent searches for school boards represent another unexamined and underutilized means of addressing the interpersonal dimensions of retention in the superintendency. Although consultants' advice is typically thought of only in terms of superintendent selection and hiring, a link to retention emerged from the one-third of our interviewees who held more than one superintendency. Perhaps not surprisingly, we found examples of active recruitment by search consultants when some women were in the midst of less-tumultuous superintendencies, and complete avoidance when they were immersed in highly conflicted settings or when they had already exited. Consultants, as gatekeepers in the process of movement from one superintendency to another, can be key to shaping boards' perceptions of what women have to offer a particular district (whether or not currently retained by another district). They can and do influence board members' expectations in informal and subtle ways. Consultants' communication with boards can be a potent means of expanding board members' conceptualizations of leadership and, thus, indirectly affect the stereotyping described earlier as an obstacle to women's retention.

Professional development of superintendents.

Of course, both sides of the board-superintendent interpersonal dynamic need to be examined. While respondents voiced several recurring suggestions for how school board members should be better prepared for their roles, they also emphasized both: (a) flaws in their own preparation for the superintendency, and (b) infrequent and limited opportunities for continuing education once on-the-job. These findings suggest changes needed in both the content and delivery of university- and professional association-sponsored preparation and professional growth programs.

The specific substantive areas thought to be most lacking included: understanding current school board dynamics; vulnerability in the superintendency; the importance of one's career path to the chief executive role; analyzing external and political influences on the board-superintendent relationship; understanding the media's influence on shaping, expanding, or constraining conflict; awareness of board turnover and knowledge of how to prevent, cope with, or capitalize on it; ways of dealing with the relentless scrutiny on the job; the predictable mobilization of teacher or administrative union forces; and self-awareness training. Regarding the latter, one woman claimed that what sustained her through the most difficult times in her relationship with the board was her view of herself and her concomitant knowledge that she neither deserved nor prompted what happened to her in her involuntary exit.

All urged increased attention to political skills-building. Their self-defined deficiencies were never in technical or human relations areas but, instead, in the political. Moreover, respondents' frequent dichotomization of "the professional" and "the political," along with an almost exclusive use of the term "politics" in negative ways, point to pressing needs to change how the content of educational politics is portrayed in preparation and professional development curricula. (e.g., Politics as a creative force rather than an inevitable evil.)

Other content knowledge deemed inadequate and directly related to superintendent-school board interrelationships was interviewing. Traditional conceptions of interview training focus on simulating the process, anticipating board member questions, and improving the quality of one's responses. Ignored or de-emphasized are proactive strategies aimed at the reverse: superintendents learning to interview boards. The latter was viewed by some interviewees as a potent means of forecasting difficulties, judging personal "fit" with the school district, and better predicting retention.

Beyond content, the format and delivery of educational programs must also change. Respondents underscored the importance of practical and problem-based approaches which extend beyond pre-service preparation to create ongoing inservice opportunities for superintendents. In many cases, universities are in key positions to track their graduates and develop regionally-based programs to provide continuing support to alumni administrators. At the preservice level of preparation, more practica, internships, and shadowing

opportunities can be designed to foster early firsthand experience working either with school boards or in other high-conflict situations where political skills can be observed, developed and practiced. The point is, one's initial superintendency does not have to be the first time one is exposed to the nature and complexity of the role. Our findings lead us to urge a shift from traditions of university advising and sponsorship focused primarily on initial hiring and placement, to broader definitions of mentorship and advocacy aimed at retention and long-term assistance on-the-job. We expand on these ideas below.

"Outsider" status in relationships.

Since approximately 94% of all superintendents and two-thirds of all school board members across the nation are men, women superintendents continue to be "outsiders" in the key leadership and governance relationships they are expected to negotiate. The isolation and "lonely at the top" feelings which affect all superintendents are compounded by the lack of a critical mass of women in superintendent cohort groups. Many of our respondents reported being among the "pioneers" in their region: "I was the first woman superintendent in that county;" "There were only four of us in the state when I was hired;" "I was the first black woman ever appointed there."

These indicators of outsider status point to a need to address the problem of retention by further strengthening both formal and informal supports available to women superintendents. We begin by focusing on formal support systems, including the assistance provided by national professional associations, state organizations of superintendents and school boards, universities, and other formally established networking groups. Many bits and pieces of the elements to be suggested below already exist in some states and regions. However, according to our respondents: (a) the overall system of supports is fragmented; (b) services are episodic and quality is not uniform; (c) the commitment to helping women in particular is typically evidenced by only one or two people in leadership positions within professional associations or universities - - themselves often "outsiders" within their organizations, or serving only limited terms; and (d) interest in tailoring available services to the needs of women and members of other underrepresented groups waxes and wanes historically, and is often dependent on the availability of special grant monies. Taken together, these factors reveal a system which can not be relied upon by

women superintendents experiencing difficulties or disenchantment in their roles. What else might be done?

Formal Support Systems

1. National administrators' and state superintendents' associations might collaborate to regionalize services and professional development opportunities. One or two annual national conventions geared specifically to women administrators are insufficient. Although several state associations of women administrators have developed over the years, their programs are often not aimed specifically at superintendents' needs. We do not suggest that episodic "conventions" are the answer to chief executives' retention. They do serve an important networking and information-sharing function, however, and could do even more if some of their formal programming included the content and practical applications described in our earlier section on professional development.

Other ongoing services and functions could be regionalized as well: for example, the development of "referral systems" or "hot lines" for problem-solving, information sharing, and reflective listening. These might be staffed by cadres of experienced superintendents committed to confidentiality. Respondents emphasized the importance of such helpers being outside the individual district, yet not so far away as to be unfamiliar with particular states' laws and customs. Women who have retired or exited from superintendencies are a small but largely untapped group who could form the core of such referral systems. Of course, travel, operational expenses, and salary would be required to sustain such regional resources. However, if we are serious about retaining more women and members of underrepresented groups, the dedication of permanent material and human resources is required.

2. Increased intra-state collaborations between school board and superintendent associations can also be influential in the retention of more women administrators. These associations are often key to networking, information dissemination, and educational lobbying within individual states. It is not uncommon for them, individually or jointly, to dedicate three to five full-day meetings per year to superintendents' needs and concerns. Nonetheless, we suspect that male majorities dominate assumptions about member needs and concerns. After all executive directorships, key chairpersonships, and

committee memberships in most state administrators' associations continue to be largely white and male. Several informants suggested that, if such organizations were to carefully examine their own histories of attentiveness to women's or newcomers' issues, lipservice and report- writing would be most likely to predominate - - specific actions would be in short supply. Some respondents reported that women and other underrepresented sub-sets of members within those organizations continue to be viewed with suspicion or misunderstanding (at best), referred to jokingly or completely ignored (at worst). In the words of one interviewee: "These two groups together can reach out and make the most impact. And you can't bypass them. If you bypass school boards associations, nothing's going to happen." We would encourage individual state administrator's and school boards' groups to work together to design services similar to those suggested above for regional support for women superintendents.

3. Universities are also in key positions to help organize and sustain more formalized supports. Seeds of several productive models are already in place, in the form of university-based "study councils," "field services" offices, and administrator academies. These often provide opportunities for superintendents to come together and share ideas. Again, however, males (professors and superintendents) predominate in these settings and the "critical mass" problem can often submerge women's and other minorities' unique concerns.

Nonetheless, it is widely known that universities respond vigorously to opportunities to obtain special monies and grants. If national and state professional associations are unable to orchestrate the kinds of regional ongoing professional development programs and services mentioned earlier, they might be able to offer financial incentives to the universities to do so. Tying funds to requirements for regionalizing services and collaborating with professional organizations would be one way to influence the shape of such initiatives. Another would be to link funding priorities specifically to service for women and other underrepresented groups in educational administration.

One model that could be university-based would be the referral and cadre system described earlier. Another approach would be to replicate a "Principals' Center" or "Academy" model but target it to women and/or new superintendents. (Remember that for 70% of our sample, their first superintendency was their

last.) What might this look like in practice? One respondent shared her vision of universities and superintendents' organizations collaborating as follows.

Each new superintendent is assigned a group of four practicing superintendents who serve as her personal consultants. Experienced female superintendents are included wherever possible, and geography is taken into account so as to increase accessibility. The group process is formalized and each five-person mini-network is also assigned a facilitator - - a professor from the university. Network groups remain in place for a minimum of two years. The facilitator arranges time, team-building, and informal interaction for the group immediately after assignments are made, to help build a sense of community among network members. (This early attention to team-building and bonding is key.) For the novice superintendent, the group becomes a "safety net." Moreover, whenever new superintendents wish or need to seek advice or information beyond the assigned mini-network, they simply contact the facilitator. If facilitators do not have the kind of expertise required, they help find it.

While unstructured networks often develop "naturally" among some superintendents, formalized systems such as the one just described may be particularly useful for women. As one interviewee reacted to this model:

> Just the power of knowing that there is a structure in place if you want to use it can mean so much....Even though people come to the superintendency with a variety of experiences, whether you're moving to a new district or staying within your own district, it's still a new experience. It's a new position and a new role and a new set of challenges. And we all need help in adjusting to those. I think sometimes we take for granted that we all know how to do all those things.

In sum, it was clear from our respondents that women superintendents work in isolation, by virtue of being "outsiders" in the overall system, and also because of geographic dispersion and unrelenting work demands. Accordingly, most of the suggestions included above are based on the assumption that formal supports must be "engineered" by those outside the local district. Professional organizations and universities are logical starting places for such coordination. While some of the above recommendations lean toward the reactive (e.g., problem-solving and crisis intervention after the fact), others are proactive (e.g. developing structured networks for ongoing and long-term professional

development). We turn our attention now to several informal approaches that can help retention.

Informal Support Systems

1. Mentoring. Approximately half of all interviewees spoke enthusiastically of individual professors' assistance, sponsorship, or advocacy "on their way up." And virtually all underscored the importance and helpfulness of male administrators as mentors and opportunity-makers throughout their careers. However, different mentorship approaches may be needed in the superintendency. For example, the within-district models relied upon in early stages of an administrative career become inappropriate. Instead, mentors external to the district are required. Also, on the way up, mentoring functions such as exposure to challenging work, role modeling, protection, and sponsorship may be key. However, once in a superintendency, coaching, counseling, consultation, and coalition-making, along with psychosocial functions such as friendship, acceptance, and validation are needed. Based on our interview data, it would seem that sustained forms of mentoring that do not end with initial placement are needed; that is, mentorships that foster ongoing, career-spanning relationships "through thick and thin."

2. University climate. Earlier we discussed ways to improve the content and methods of instruction relevant to the preparation and professional development of superintendents. However, half our interviewees also lamented the "chilly climate" for women at the university. For example, despite the assistance of certain individual professor-mentors, many described receiving little encouragement from most professors in their pursuit of advanced administrative roles. Moreover, there continues to be a noticeable absence of women professors of educational administration and professors with previous experience in the superintendency. What does this have to do with retention? Obviously, the chilly climate must be made warmer, if any of the previously-described formal networking and continuing education recommendations which depend on university personnel are to work.

3. Women-to-women supports. Many respondents cautioned that exclusive reliance on women's associations is both impossible and inadequate. We agree. However other interviewees cautioned against underestimating the

power of one-to-one informal connections. We recommend that all women administrators and professors do more to reach out and support one another. Men have been doing this in the workplace for a long time, often referred to as the "ole boys' network."

In sum, this section of our paper has described several approaches to retention which focus on "the interpersonal." Our recommendations ranged from better preparation of school board members and superintendents to creating or strengthening formal and informal support systems for women. These suggestions were developed in response to two major themes in these superintendency exiters' data: the salience of superintendent-school board relationships, and the outsider status of women in a male dominated work role. We turn now to discussion of approaches to retention aimed at the organizational level.

The Organizational Level

Distinct from "individual" and "interpersonal" aspects of superintendents' experience, the "organizational" refers to those structures and features specific to the K-12 public educational system. Organizational analyses shift the focus from the women themselves (and primarily psychosocial interpretations) to the structures within which they work. In this section, we suggest several additional approaches to retention, each developed in response to findings about organizational barriers to women superintendents' success. We refer specifically to selection and tracking practices, certification and retirement policies, governance systems, and the structure of the role itself.

Selection and tracking.

Our sample mirrored national data indicating that African-American superintendents serve in urban systems, and white women serve in districts with smaller enrollments than their male counterparts (Glass, 1991). We know that population growth, stronger tax bases, and higher socioeconomic status school districts are found in the suburbs. Yet these are not where most women obtain superintendencies. We also know that informal sponsorship plays a deciding role in administrative selection and tracking. According to Valverde (1974), administrative sponsorship in education is dominated by white males and has historically operated either to exclude or limit the opportunities of women and

minorities. Extant tracking and selection practices serve to disadvantage women, as they perpetuate a cycle of relegation to the least desirable superintendencies. It is no surprise that retention is an issue in such contexts.

Ragins and Sundstrom (1989) view inequitable tracking and selection as key organizational processes which can wield powerful negative impact at the individual level as well as at the level of the organization. This may take the form of lowered self-confidence and limited career expectations. The latter is reflected in the words of a voluntary exiter in our study:

> As a woman, I thought I needed to start out in a small rural district. I thought it would be much more difficult to get a superintendency in a larger, suburban district....Some of the men start out in small rural districts too. But they seem to very easily make the jump to the next size of district.

We think it important to question prevailing assumptions about appropriate "starter districts" for women. Consultants who conduct superintendent searches develop and maintain these processes of selection and tracking. They are in key positions to challenge entrenched customs and to change school boards' mindsets and hiring decisions. Who are these professional search consultants? Mostly male university professors and self-employed retired or exited superintendents. However in some states, like New York, intermediate-unit superintendents (B.O.C.E.S.) wield considerable power in both the initial selection and the continued career advancement of superintendents throughout the state. This creates a tightly controlled system and, we would argue, one that is almost impermeable to women and minorities.

What might be done differently? Strengthening policies and enforcement of affirmative action could help. Encouraging school boards to consult with persons other than white males might lead to more inclusive selection pools. (Women and minority search consultants do exist now!) State administrator associations could direct needed attention to selection and tracking inequities by monitoring, analyzing, and disseminating data about placement patterns within particular intermediate units or statewide (e.g., Where are women and members of other underrepresented groups getting superintendencies? Which are the lowest status districts in the state? Do these two variables correlate positively? If so, who benefits?)

In cooperation with state education departments, it would also be useful for state superintendents' associations to begin collecting and monitoring data about retention and exiting patterns. This would require a change from current practices, (largely focused on tracking positions), to instead focus on tracking individuals. If such data were collected and disaggregated by sex, we would obtain a better understanding of retention and exiting issues. With the exception perhaps of California, we are currently limited to largely anecdotal data in these regards (Hall & Difford, 1992).

Institutional structures.

The creation of national certification and retirement systems for superintendents could be helpful in retaining more women in these roles. Given societal norms and prevalent sex-typed leadership expectations, women often have to search farther and wider than men to find a good match with a school board or district. African-Americans, traditionally employed primarily by urban communities, must look even further for an appropriate "fit." State-specific certification and retirement structures function as disincentives to casting the net so broadly. In some cases, it may be more logical (for retirement planning) to exit a superintendency and assume a directorship or principalship in a nearby district, than to take another superintendency across state lines. Again, with such disproportionately low percentages of qualified women and members of other underrepresented groups in the superintendency, we contend that discouraging even a few individuals because of certification and retirement considerations represents a loss to the profession. An interstate model exists for college professors, (e.g., TIAA-CREF). Why not extend it, or design a parallel system, to include superintendents? An African-American respondent who had already held superintendencies in two different states described the seriousness of this dilemma:

> ....what do the studies show? That the average turnover is every two and a half years for [urban] superintendents. So where do blacks then go when they leave a superintendency for any reason? There are just not many places to go....And you mess up your retirement system if you go all over the country.

Another recommendation centers on the desirability of developing a national resource/database that could be accessed by superintendent search consultants. On the one hand, Chase and Bell's (1990) research demonstrates how consultants function as key gatekeepers and how their language and ideologies contribute to "the persistence of men's dominance of positions of power." For example, assumptions embedded in the following excerpt reveal norms and practices that can impede retention:

> [As a search consultant] you don't want to take a candidate who's losing his job, because the board doesn't want him. They want candidates who are happy in their current jobs. Then the consultants have to convince the candidate that this would be a nice place to move to! (laugh)

On the other hand, Glass (1991) points out that, nationwide, both women and minority superintendents are more likely to have obtained their superintendency through a process led by a professional search consultant. As a key informant reported, the fragmented system that exists makes it very difficult for those who are genuinely searching for women candidates: "Even AASA [the American Association of School Administrators] doesn't always know who's out there...that is, if you're one of the headhunters who even bothers to call to try to find women and minorities. Not all are proactive."

Perhaps more affirmative action in the search process would be taken if resources were devoted to creating, managing, and continually updating a national registry of prospective candidates. We know that, historically, certain individuals within the Council of Great City Schools, AASA, and its Office of Minority Affairs have informally served this information and referral function. But, as mentioned earlier, interest in and funding for such endeavors are often intermittent. It would take concerted effort, backed by dollars and key coalitions like the National Policy Board on Educational Administration, to create and sustain such a clearinghouse/registry.

Governance Structures.

As mentioned earlier, disenchantment with school board politics was a major factor in our sample's decisions to exit. While improved preparation, professional growth opportunities, and conflict resolution skills-building for superintendents and school board members may be useful ways of addressing

this impediment to retention, a full third of our involuntary exiters advocated a more radical approach: the elimination of governing boards. This suggestion is not a new one in the history of analysis and commentary on the tension in superintendent-school board relationships. (For a recent example, see Finn, 1991). We view such suggestions as unrealistic, however, based on the observation that "longstanding governmental institutions rarely disappear, particularly those so well-wrapped in the all-American ideal (and ideology) of local control" (Tallerico, 1991, p. 94).

Currently, several major studies have reached more moderate conclusions about the importance of school board reform. Some advocate piloting and experimentation with heretofore unexamined varieties of governance models (Twentieth Century, 1992). Others recommend leaving the existing basic governance structure in place but having "states change the roles and responsibilities of school boards so that they become true policy boards" (Danzberger et al., 1992, p. xi). We join the latter in underscoring the importance of revising the ponderous state legislative codes for education which contribute to school boards' micro-management of operational functions and distraction from broader educational policy concerns.

The Role Itself.

In examining the superintendent-school board equation of late, more attention has been devoted to suggested reform of governing boards than to changes in the superintendency. We think it may be time to reform the role itself. That is, rather than focusing exclusively on, for example, strengthening women's political skills so as to better "fit" the job as it exists today, we must simultaneously question what the superintendent's role has become and aim at its reconstruction. There is ample evidence, both from our sample of exited women and previous research dominated by male respondents, that superintendents perceive that the job has become consumed by conflict and vulnerability, and deflected from the core tasks of teaching and learning. We would encourage experimentation with different ways of conceptualizing the role of superintendents and the elements that comprise the role.

<u>The Societal Level</u>

We have extrapolated practical implications from our findings by suggesting changes in policy and practice to increase the retention of women in

the superintendency. Thus far, we have framed our recommendations in terms of individual, interpersonal, and organizational levels of analysis. In this final section, we grapple with the even broader social context of all women's work.

The enormity and variety of conditions mitigating against success and retention in key executive roles can be overwhelming. We are talking about the need to change traditional conceptions of leadership so that women's contributions will be more fully valued. We advocate reforming domestic expectations so that those who have broken through the glass ceiling need not lament that what they really need at home is a wife. We underscore the need to continue to chip away at social norms that subtly discriminate, limit opportunities, and exacerbate already difficult working conditions for women. We are talking about sex roles, cultural conditioning and socialization, and embedded societal stereotyping well beyond educational institutions. As far-reaching as many of these concerns are, we concur with Shakeshaft (1989) that they are at the root of most other individual and organizational conditions affecting women's work. The larger societal context must be acknowledged as problematic. Although Shakeshaft's comments were addressed specifically to hiring and training prospective women administrators, it seems clear to us that these recommendations likewise apply to the retention of women superintendents:

> To eliminate the barriers, one must change the androcentric nature of the culture in which they flourish. To do this, behavioral changes in men and women, structural and legal changes in school and society, and attitudinal changes in everyone must be achieved. (Shakeshaft, 1989, p. 126)

FUTURE RESEARCH

In this monograph, we have: (a) identified and briefly summarized major patterns of findings in our study of why women exit the superintendency, and (b) discussed several levels of change that must be addressed to help retain more women in superintendencies. With respect to the latter, selected recommendations for action and policy are outlined in the Appendix. The purpose of this concluding section is to assess where we are in understanding women superintendents' exits, and to suggest additional questions warranting future study.

There is no reason to believe that the diverse group of women we spoke to are "outliers," or that the issues raised by respondents in this study are unrepresentative of the challenges faced by broader populations of women who have exited the superintendency. Additional research is needed, however, to yield more complete understandings of the phenomena uncovered in this exploratory study. Among the broader questions raised: How can quantitative baseline data be collected nationwide, so that we can examine voluntary and involuntary exiting over time? What patterns would be revealed by disaggregating such data by gender? What similarities and differences would comparative qualitative study by gender reveal? If pervasive social norms are at the root of sex-typed expectations and roles, to what extent can changes in policy and preparation programs aimed at the superintendency make any difference? Do incumbent superintendents speak of the political nature of the role in ways similar to or different from those who have exited the superintendency?

Other more specific questions include: Though there were no clear distinctions between urban and non-urban superintendents' reasons for exit in this study, would larger samples reveal important differences? We found four categories of "pushes from" the superintendency for involuntary exiters: school board dysfunction, union influence, non-educational foci, and moral/ethical clashes. How, if at all, do the size or other demographic characteristics of the school board matter? Does union influence continue to be a major factor in states where collective bargaining laws are weak?
How is any sense of derailment from core educational foci related to the path taken "coming up the ranks" to the superintendency? Do men and women approach moral and ethical clashes with their boards differently?

Twenty percent of our sample (4 of 20) pursued litigation related to unfair termination of contract. What happens to women and men superintendents who sue their school boards? Under what conditions are they considered "damaged goods"? Under what conditions are they subsequently hired by other districts? Some of our study's participants suggested that school boards are more likely to "do the buyout" for men than for women. Would systematic research confirm such a conclusion?

This study raises many questions, even while it has identified a number of potentially enlightening "pushes" and "pulls" at work in both voluntary and involuntary exits of women superintendents. Though findings have been presented under the separate rubrics of "politics" and "gender," we know that these are intertwining elements in a complex dynamic. The social constructions of gender and politics intersect in a system of relationships and power so rich and entangled that we have only begun to explore them in this monograph. One of our primary goals was to conduct a study that could be influential in improving women's lives. We therefore urge immediate experimentation with the approaches to retention elaborated herein, while additional research on the questions raised continues. Current and prospective women educational leaders deserve no less.

APPENDIX
WHERE TO NEXT? RESEARCH INTO ACTION

The suggestions which follow are intended to encourage particular stakeholder groups to consider specific actions and policies aimed at helping retain more women in superintendencies. Although presented in bullet-form here, these recommendations should be understood within the context of the entire preceding document. While other reports address the pre-service preparation, recruitment, and placement of administrative leaders in education, our suggestions center primarily on the continued professional development and retention of women in the superintendency. The five groups to whom we address our recommendations are: local school boards, universities, state policymaking leaders, professional associations, and the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA).

LOCAL SCHOOL BOARDS:

* Keep abreast of current research and demographics on women and members of other underrepresented groups in the superintendency in your state and the nation.

* Provide encouragement, time, and funding for your woman superintendent to participate actively in statewide and regional networking, support, and professional development groups.

* Maintain focus on policy by exercising ongoing, formative assessment of your superintendent's progress in implementing board and district goals. (See pages 15-16 for an example of executive session communication for this purpose.)

* Engage in professional growth activities yourselves, by attending state and regional conferences focused on understanding women's/alternative ways of leadership.

* Act affirmatively in hiring your next superintendent by asking yourselves and your search consultant specific questions, such as: Are we excluding any women or minority candidates solely because they involuntarily exited another district? Or because their previous superintendency was in a very small district? (more women's than men's are). Do we think of previous experience in a conflictual board-superintendent relationship as a "red badge of courage" for some, an indication of "ineptness" for others? Are we relying primarily on the advice and perspectives of white male consultants in this search process?

UNIVERSITIES:

* Expand your conception of "preparation" for educational leadership to include ongoing support, long-term advocacy, and continued professional development activities for practicing administrators. Such expanded outreach programs can be critical to the retention of women and members of other underrepresented groups in the superintendency.

* Include political skills-building opportunities in the formal preparatory curriculum, practica, internships, residencies, and advanced professional development activities for current and prospective women superintendents.

* Provide research-based data on the current status, history, and progress of women and other underrepresented groups in the superintendency in your area, for local school boards and state professional organizations.

* Collaborate with interstate networks of administrators' organizations to provide targeted professional development and support activities for

current women superintendents. (See pages 30-31 for a specific illustration of one model.)

* Provide research and evaluation data on such networking and support activities.

STATE POLICYMAKING LEADERS:

* Revise the ponderous and excessively detailed state legislative codes and educational regulations which require school board involvement and action on administrative matters. Such mandates serve to deflect board attention from broad policymaking and goal-setting foci, and concomitantly encourage micro-management....a frequent source of conflict in board-superintendent relationships.

* Strengthen accountability for affirmative action in administrative employment by monitoring statewide data for patterns of entry, retention, and exit. Disaggregate and analyze data by superintendents' gender and race, as well as by socioeconomic status of school districts.

* Review and report annually on both the hiring and retention of women and members of other underrepresented groups in the superintendency across the state.

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS:

* Provide incentives to universities and state administrator and school boards professional organizations to initiate programs aimed at networking and support services targeted specifically for women superintendents. The proportionally small numbers and geographic dispersion of women superintendents nationwide require creative, collaborative regional and interstate approaches to this special population's continuing professional development needs. (See pages 19-20 for several examples of specific approaches and activities.)

* Hold joint sessions with association leaders from the two or three states contiguous to yours, to brainstorm and implement additional regionalized services and support activities for women superintendents. Include

women who have exited superintendencies as consultants and leaders in such initiatives.

* Target at least 25% of your organization's regular professional development funds to the support and retention of women and members of other underrepresented groups in educational administrative positions in your state. Avoid exclusive reliance on soft-monies, special grants, or other intermittent resource allocation systems for attending to equity and retention issues in the superintendency.

THE NATIONAL POLICY BOARD FOR EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

* Revise mission statement to reflect expanded concern for and emphasis on, not only the "recruitment and placement," but also the retention "of women and minorities [sic] in positions of educational leadership."

* Coordinate the development of a national data bank on prospective, current, and exited women superintendents, that could be easily accessed by school boards and superintendent search consultants. The existing informal and fragmented system of locating qualified candidates makes it extremely difficult for those genuinely seeking women and members of other underrepresented groups for the superintendency.

* Attract and sustain financial support for this data bank, by using your unique national visibility, coalition status, and credibility with private funding sources.

* Capitalize on your unique position by encouraging member associations to self-assess and monitor their commitments to the Board's mission (as revised above) by examining, for example:

  • the gender and racial makeup of key leadership positions and committee memberships in the organization; and
  • the organization's history of resource allocation and programming targeted specifically to women superintendents.

* Issue a Request for Proposals to pilot and fund several national "advocacy centers" to serve as demonstration projects for the support of women superintendents. Influence the shape of such initiatives by linking

funding to requirements for regionalizing services and collaborating with superintendent and school board professional associations.

* Spearhead the development of a national retirement system for school superintendents, parallel to your current efforts to create a national certification system for administrators. More women and members of other underrepresented groups could be retained in superintendencies by eliminating extant powerful disincentives to crossing state lines for a second or third superintendency. (See pages 37-38.)

* Support additional research to better understand the experiences, exits, and other issues relevant to the retention of women in the superintendency.

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FOOTNOTES

{1} A summary of the research for this report was presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, April, 1993, Atlanta, GA.